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The White Rose

MEMPHIS.

BY W. C. FALKNER.

CHAPTER XXX.

INGOMAR'S STORY CONTINUED.

For three days after Harry and I had arrived at home, scarcely any change was perceptible in Lottie's condition, except an inclination to sleep all the time, which Plaxico contended was a most favorable sign. The Doctor's conjecture proved correct, for at the end of ten days, her condition was so much improved, that he pronounced her entirely out of danger.

"Good nursing is all she needs now," said he. "And I hesitate not to assert that no patient ever had more devoted nurses than did Lottie. I never left the premises until I was satisfied that all danger was over, and I did not go then of my own accord."

Lottie ordered me to go and see Viola, and to carry a hamper basket full of fresh flowers that she had caused to be gathered for her.

"Tell Viola," said she, "that as soon as I am able to ride in the carriage I will come to see her. Ask her if she wants anything, and tell her that she must be of good cheer, and we will defeat the enemy yet. Now do your best to encourage the poor thing, and assure her that I will soon be with her to stay all the time."

"Lottie," said I, "you don't think of going back to stay in jail again do you?"

"Certainly I do; why not?"

"People will talk, you know."

"Let them talk as much as they please. God has spared my life in order that I might save my dear friend, and I mean to do it. Eddie do you still doubt me? Can you trust me? When I tell you Viola is innocent, I tell you that which I know, not what I think."

I did not make any answer, because I was bewildered and did not know what to say; hence I abruptly left the room to carry the flowers and message as directed. Lottie had vowed that she would never marry me until Viola's innocence was established, and the proof of her guilt still continued to rise higher and higher, until it made my heart sick to think of it. Mr. Rockland had given up all hopes of the case, and was arranging his plans to lay the matter before the Governor, in order to secure executive clemency for the poor girl. When I entered Viola's cell I was shocked at her appearance. There was a look of hopeless despair settled on her face, and her cheeks were bloodless and deadly pale. She was dressed in plain black silk without ornaments. Her pale face brightened up when I entered, and she rose to meet me, holding out her hand for me to take. When I delivered the flowers and Lottie's kind message, telling her that Lottie was out of all danger, she burst into tears and sank down on the sofa. After a while she brushed the tears and said:

"Pardon me Mr. Demar; this flow of tears has relieved my aching heart. God has answered my prayers, when I had lost all hope. Oh, sir, if you knew how I have prayed for dear Lottie's life, you would better understand my love for her. I have remained on my knees hour after hour, begging God to let her live, and He has heard and answered me. Take a seat, Mr. Demar, and tell me about your late troubles."

I complied with her request by giving her a detailed history of the unfortunate occurrences that had kept me away from home.

"You now know from experience, Mr. Demar, how hard it is to be punished for a crime you did not commit," said she when I had finished

the history. "I think God afflicts us in order to humble us, and to make us better; but you have not told me anything about your friends yet."

I knew in an instant that she wanted to hear from Harry, but I doubted the propriety of mentioning his name, because I did not know what he intended to do. I therefore confined my remarks to Dr. and Mrs. Dodson, and Mr. Rockland and his wife, studiously avoiding Harry's name. I saw that she was disappointed, and more anxious than ever to hear about him. I rose to depart, when she begged me to stay a while longer.

"You have not told me about all of your friends yet," she said as she blushed and looked down at the carpet.

I noticed that she was trembling from head to foot, and her bosom rose and fell rapidly. I had arrived at the conclusion that it was best for me not to mention Harry's name. I thought that the best plan to bring about a reconciliation, would be to say nothing on the subject, hoping that she would send an invitation to him to pay her a visit.

"Is there any one in particular whom you wish to inquire about, Miss Bramlett?" I said.

"Yes—no—that is, no one in particular; but I was thinking that Lottie would be so happy to have her brother with her." And as she said this, the crimson tinge on her cheeks became as red as blood could make it.

"Yes, she is very happy now, since her brother has returned."

"Is he? Ah! never mind, Mr. Demar, I will not detain you any longer. Give my love to Lottie, and bring her to see me as soon as she is able to come."

I took her extended hand and felt it quiver; her eyes met mine for a second, and there was a meaning look in them which I understood. I could not leave her thus; my resolution vanished at once.

"What shall I tell him for you, Miss Bramlett?"

"Tell who, Mr. Demar?"

"Have you no message for me to deliver to any one except Lottie?"

"Yes—no; I—I—good-by Mr. Demar."

I passed out of the room and spoke a few words to the jailer, and when I went to leave I glanced a look into Viola's room. She was lying on the bed convulsed with grief, and weeping bitterly. The thoughts that crowded on my mind as I walked back to Mr. Rockland's residence, were not by any means of a pleasant nature. It was plain to my mind that Lottie would never be happy unless Viola could be cleared. I began to realize the fact that my fate depended on the final result of Miss Bramlett's case; consequently I determined to give all my attention to it. I sought and obtained an interview with Mr. Rockland, in order to have a consultation about it. The iron man (as he was sometimes called) shook his head ominously when I asked him to advise me what I should do about the case.

"The supreme court will reverse it," said he, "beyond question, but that will do no good. It will only serve to prolong our troubles. The lower court committed a very grave error in allowing the jury to disperse before the evidence closed; hence I say it is certain that a new trial will be granted; but again I ask where is the benefit to Miss Bramlett? Every one knows she is guilty; the proof established it beyond the possibility of a reasonable doubt. Poor girl! I pity her, for she was not responsible for the crime. She was crazy beyond question when she committed it. She shall not be punished, because I will secure executive clemency when the court shall have finally disposed of her case. Mr. Demar, I have just been informed that it is Lottie's intention to return to the jail, with a view of remaining with Miss Bramlett, as soon as she is able to go."

"Yes, Mr. Rockland, I have heard Lottie say that such was her intention."

"This must be prevented by all means, and no one can do it but you; and I shall expect you to exert your influence in that direction. Her reputation has already suffered to some extent, by her conduct, and it must be prevented in future."

"Do you know, Mr. Rockland, that Lottie affirms that she knows Miss Bramlett is innocent?"

"Ah, Demar, that is one of her

strange infatuations. She is a sensible girl, in whose judgment I have unbounded confidence; but her friendship for Miss Bramlett has caused her heart to get the upper hand of her brain. She thinks she knows that her friend is innocent, but what does she know about the rules of evidence? She thinks every thing that she hears, can be offered as proof."

"I imagine, sir, that you will find that Lottie is better posted as to the rules of evidence than you think she is. She has been reading Mr. Greenleaf's treatise on evidence—also Mr. Starkie's and many others. She seems to comprehend and grasp the meaning as well as an experienced lawyer would. She says she will furnish evidence to clear Miss Bramlett, and to convict the real criminal."

"Ah! Demar, that is the strangest mystery that has ever come under my observation. If she knew that Miss Bramlett was innocent, why should she let her remain in jail, when she could have gotten her out with a 'HABEAS CORPUS.' No, Demar, if you build your hopes on that foundation, you will meet with nothing but defeat and disappointment."

The reasons, which Lottie gives for withholding the proof, appear to me to be good. She says that she is waiting to collect evidence sufficient to convict the guilty one; and that this is done at the request of Miss Bramlett."

"Very well, Demar, I see that you are determined to pin your faith to Lottie's skirts. The truth of it is, love has got the upper hand of your judgment, while Lottie is carried away by her affection for Miss Bramlett. I admire those who stick to their friends, but we ought to be very cautious in selecting them. Next week the supreme court will take up the case, and then a new trial will be granted certain, and you and Lottie shall have a fair chance to establish the defendant's innocence if you can."

When I left the iron lawyer, I was chilled to the very marrow of my bones by the coldness of his manner. About eight days after my arrival at home, I was called from Lottie's side (where most of my time was being spent), to assist Doctor Dodson in performing a difficult surgical operation on one of his patients. In fact, I performed the operation myself under Doctor Dodson's advice and assistance.

"Ah, hal my boy," said the old Doctor, when the delicate job was finished, "you are an excellent surgeon, so you are. I am proud of you—so I am. You will do to tie to; ah, hal that you will. Lottie need not be afraid to hitch on to you, my boy; no indeed, you will make a living for her; yes, yes, ah, hal she won't starve by marrying you. You must remain with this patient day and night, until all danger is over. Ah, hal my boy, stick to it like a leech; I'll relieve you day after to-morrow."

By this means I was kept away from Lottie two days and nights, much against my wish; but I stood to my post until I was relieved on the third morning by Doctor Dodson. I hurried to Mr. Rockland's residence and met his wife at the door.

"How is Lottie?" I hurriedly enquired as I entered the house.

"Improving rapidly," said she; "though I don't think she is quite as prudent as she ought to be."

"Can I see her now, Mrs. Rockland?"

"No, Edward, she is asleep now; I believe; but come into breakfast, and then you can see her."

I obeyed reluctantly, because I did not feel like eating. As soon as breakfast was over Mrs. Rockland went into Lottie's room to inform her that I was waiting to see her.

"She will receive you, Edward," said the kind lady, as she came into the parlor where I was waiting.

"She bade me tell you to come in."

The door of Lottie's room was half open when I entered; and the bed, where I expected to see her, was made up and covered with a snow-white counterpane; every article of furniture was freshly dusted and properly arranged; two large vases of fresh flowers stood on the mantle, and the room contained no evidences of an occupant.

"Ah! she has moved to her old room up stairs," I exclaimed as I turned to go out, when I felt some one pluck my hair behind. I imagined my amazement, if you can,

when I hurriedly turned round and saw nothing but an empty room; where I had expected to see Lottie. I had not remained there, however, but a second or two, when I heard a suppressed laugh; and looking behind the door, there I discovered my darling in full dress—beautiful, radiant, charming and lovely—with a mischievous smile playing on her face. Never had I seen her looking so beautiful before; the color of the rose and lily were mingled on her fair cheeks, whilst evidences of restored health appeared. Her toilet had been arranged with great care and exquisite taste, evidently done to please me, for I had sent word that I was coming to see her that morning. She wore a most magnificent rose-pink, brocade silk dress, with full train; the body and skirts were covered with point de Venice lace, whilst the bodice fitted the slender waist so neatly, that her square shoulders and tall, queenly form exhibited their beauty to great advantage. My picture, encased in a heavy gold locket, was suspended by a costly chain around her neck, and my diamond ring sparkled on her finger. The great rolls of pretty golden curls had been half confined behind her head with a blue ribbon, whilst a fresh white rose, bordered on all sides with pink geraniums, adorned her throat. As soon as my eyes encountered the lovely creature before me, I threw up my hands with an exclamation of surprise. When I left her two days previous, she was in bed, where I had expected to find her still; but when I beheld her beautiful form standing before me, with all the loveliness and beauty of an angel, I was dazzled and overwhelmed with amazement. I was not able to understand how such a speedy recovery had been effected. The pretty blue eyes had regained all their charming brilliancy and the stately form its beautiful symmetry; in fact my darling had never appeared so lovely in my eyes as she did then.

"Why, Eddie!" she exclaimed as I took her in my arms, "where have you been hiding all this time? I declare if you play me another such a dodge, I will set the police on your track."

"Don't ask me any questions now, Lottie; I am too happy to talk. Let me look at you good; you are so pretty to-day; I never saw you looking so well."

"I never felt better in my life—am as strong as I ever was. I was up early this morning, dressed myself without assistance, made up my bed, re-arranged the furniture, and am now ready for breakfast. And such an appetite as I have—it is like that of a wolf. You were surprised to see me up and dressed; you admire my appearance; well, I am glad you do. You shall not see me eat breakfast; I should be ashamed to let you see how much I can devour. Go, order the carriage, while I am eating; I am going to see Viola this morning. Why don't you go along, Eddie? What are you waiting for?"

"Don't you know?"

"I have a very strong suspicion; very well, I suppose I must be kind to the old darling, since he has been so true to, and suffered so much for me. Take it quick and go, for I am starving. There! there! Eddie, go along with you; don't you see how you have torn my hair down. I declare you have almost smothered me; you are like a Russian bear."

She dodged under my arm, and went into the dining room. I went out and ordered the coachman to get the carriage ready, then went back to the parlor and waited for Lottie.

"Well, Eddie," she said as she entered the parlor, and took a seat on the sofa by my side, "I have devoured every thing on the table; and like Oliver Twist, I wanted more; but mother closed down on me, and even refused to let me eat the cold scraps that were left in the cupboard."

"I fear you are imprudent, Lottie," said I, "but I am truly glad to know that you have an appetite." "Thank you, Eddie, but now I must ask you to talk business with me a while. We must lay aside all selfish thoughts, and go to work on Viola's case. You must not talk to me about love or marriage; you must not mention the subject until after Viola's trial; in all seriousness I request you to promise me here and now that you will devote your whole attention to this business, and that you will not mention love."

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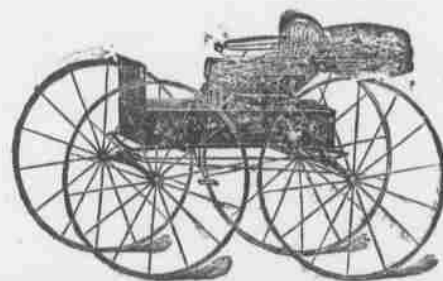
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